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## ROUMANIA VS. THE PEACE CONFERENCE

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Why has Roumania calmly ignored the Peace Conference lately, except for occasional explanations or excuses which seem like studious afterthoughts? This is intended less as a defense of her point of view than as an exposition of it, together with a little of its near historical background.

About Easter of 1919, some English gunboats made a demonstration on the Danube below Budapest—a bluff, the French and Roumanian officers further down the river called it, since the ships retreated as soon as shot at. Whereupon, so the officers at Zimnicea told me, Budapest was bombarded from the air, resulting in a considerable number of civilian casualties. French, Roumanian, even English officers spoke of this affair contemptuously, as unproductive of any possible good and certain to give Bela Kun's government the impression that spitework was being employed because forces were not available for real military intervention.

At this time the allied expedition in Odessa was on its last legs. It had cut the city off from its hinterland, so that to supply the population, swollen by a large number of soldiers, required the shipping which might otherwise have carried relief to the starving peoples of the Balkans. Even then, adequate provisioning was impossible. The speculators' paradise was here. Shipments of such things as thread and shoes for Roumania were diverted to Odessa—since cotton thread was worth only from \$1 to \$2 a spool in Roumania, and ordinary shoes only \$40 or \$50 per pair! Then came the Allied retreat from Odessa to the Dneister, the front the Roumanians had pleaded for from the start; but it was a demoralized army, almost without material and quite without morale, which arrived there. The Rou-

manian troops in North Bessarabia had fighting spirit—they had not been in Odessa—but they lacked everything else. There was next to no ammunition for the guns, and not even oxen to move them. Sixty kilometers of the crazy railroad had been laid on the ground by Russian women during the war. Travel on it was like riding a tramp steamer in a heavy gale, and the roadside was lined with the skeletons of cars which had given it up and rolled off, to be immediately stripped of everything combustible by the freezing soldiers and peasants. In the center of this front were the French, also practically without ammunition. They were mostly veterans from the Salonica front, vindictively hated somebody for sending them to this desolate country, and had no intention of getting hurt in what they considered a ridiculous post-war adventure. The miserable railroads had almost no cars and an insufficient supply of wood for fuel, so it was hard enough to get food to the troops, not to mention adequate ammunition to sustain a serious attack. The roads were entirely out of the question—a sea of mud where not quite washed out.

An idea of the French morale may be gained from the fact that at Reni, where we had to wait all day for a train, the troops amused themselves by firing their military rifles at the crows in the tall trees back of the station. Creeping through the low country to the east of here, the rickety locomotive stopping every few miles for repairs or to take on wood, every duck came in for a volley from the train. Some of the marksmanship was really not bad—but it did not endanger the Russian cause much.

Along the lower Dneister were the Greeks and Poles. The latter were disaffected because Roumania had allowed the fleeing Ukrainians to come in, disarmed them and shipped them to Galicia, where they were at war with the Poles, their allies in Bessarabia! The Greeks, who had shown some disposition to fight at Odessa, were behind the estuary of the river, where they were very unlikely to be attacked.

The Roumanians knew that the allied troops, which were requisitioning a large part of the transportation and other

resources of the country, had no military value. They knew that a real, concerted push from the Russians and Hungarians would come through, because there were not enough Roumanian soldiers to go round. In Transylvania, the Hungarians, encouraged by the English and French fiascos, committed some persecutions and a few real atrocities, and their talk about recovering their lost territory made their Czeco-Slovak, Serbian and Roumanian neighbors very nervous. Roumania remobilized her army under incredible difficulties—there was real starvation in the country, it was planting time and there was a cruel dearth of uniforms, shoes, hospital supplies, arms and transportation,—and drove the Hungarians back to the Theiss River. They offered to occupy Hungary and put an end to the Kun government, but Paris would not permit it.

Put in the Roumanians' place, we should have regarded the manoeuvres of the Allied Conference in Paris about as they did. Throughout the late spring and the first half of the summer of 1919, the Hungarian government continued to collect arms and munitions and to form armies. While the Allied economic blockade robbed the communists of any chance of eventual success, those responsible for it neither did nor allowed to be done anything positive either to set up the sort of government they would prefer or to protect the surrounding small countries from the formidable military force which was being organized. Paris was willing to use starvation as a weapon against Hungarian civilians, but was unwilling to use or allow to be used the bayonets which would be the sole efficacious means of dealing with the armed men. In the war certain to come, as it looked from the Near Eastern angle, the only part played by the Allied Conference was to legislate that everyone must wait until the Hungarians were fully ready, and then give them the advantage of striking when and where they chose.

To get the Roumanian point of view before us, it may not be amiss to briefly review a few facts about the war in the Near East which are generally understood there but not here. Western ideas about the reason for Roumania's entrance into the war in 1916 and the facts of her participa-

tion in it are founded on a myth which the Allied governments allowed their press to create because they did not dare publish the secret treaty of Bucarest and attached military convention, signed August 17 of that year. Not only were the Allies willing to pay a high price for Roumanian aid (as had been the case with Italy a year earlier), but they went a step further and practically forced her to accept it. It was a letter signed by General Joffre and delivered to the war ministry at Bucarest July 6, 1916, which brought Roumania into the conflict—not pressure from Russia, as has been repeatedly asserted. Russia, especially General Alexieff, had consistently opposed Roumanian intervention, and in the letter mentioned, General Joffre takes pains to explain that he has straightened out the matter with his Russian colleague, from whom a letter of confirmation will arrive *later*. The tone of this whole Joffre letter is categorical. In terms of the threatening German attitude of the time, it practically constituted an ultimatum.<sup>1</sup>

A glance at this Bucarest treaty and military convention (published in *le Temps*, February 4, 1919), read in the light of our present knowledge, throws a flood of light on the reasons for the Roumanian defeat and much of the friction which has since arisen. The delivery of the 300 tons *per diem* of military material promised by the Entente, (Article 4, military convention) stopped at the end of the fourth day—remember that Roumania is a non-manufacturing country, and had been practically isolated for two years. The 1916 offensive undertaken by Roumania against Hungary was not due primarily to Roumanian territory-hunger, as most people in this country still appear to believe, but was prescribed by the Allies in Article 1 of the military convention. It will be remembered that the Galician attack of General Broussilof—which was to support the Roumanian right wing in these Transylvanian operations—suddenly stopped. The troops the Allies were to send to defend the Bulgarian frontier were insufficient in number, of poor quality, and arrived too late. The pre-

<sup>1</sup> For this letter, see Basilescu, *La Roumanie dans la Guerre et dans la Paix*, Paris, 1919, Vol. I, p. 179.

liminary agreement had been for 250,000; but the Russian staff insisted that 50,000 would be sufficient, since General Sarrail (Article 1 of military convention) was to begin an offensive eight days before that of the Roumanians, keeping all the Bulgarian and German forces busy elsewhere. Instead of 50,000 the number actually sent was 30,000 mostly prisoners and deserters from the Austro-Hungarian armies, and even these were still wandering about in the Dobroudjan steppes when the Bulgarians fell upon the Roumanian garrison at Turtukai and overwhelmed it. Instead of beginning the Salonica offensive, as agreed, a churchyard peace descended upon that front, allowing General Mackensen to withdraw most of the troops and form the Bulgarian-German-Turkish army along the Danube which took the Roumanians in the rear and sealed the fate of their capital. In fact, a calm settled down practically everywhere else, allowing the Germans to transfer their best shock and Alpine troops and unlimited material, until the Roumanians were outnumbered two to one and hopelessly outclassed in artillery, munitions, aircraft, transport facilities and every kind of engineering supplies.

Through Allied carelessness and inefficiency, Roumania was overrun, stripped much cleaner than was Belgium or Eastern France, and an incredible amount of damage done to immovable property. The German-Hungarian records, left behind in the hasty evacuation of Bucarest, show nearly 4,000,000 tons of material taken out of Roumania. Besides this, the amount stolen must be reckoned with, and the property unofficially confiscated. No mention is made of railway rolling stock, though hundreds of locomotives and thousands of cars are missing. A recent census of live stock shows that over 3,000,000,000 francs' worth have disappeared—pre-war valuation; it would take many times that to replace them now. The Hungarian share of the requisitions is, according their own figures, about 1,500,000 tons. This is, in terms of the European cars, (most of which have a capacity of ten metric tons), 150,000 carloads. We shall have occasion to refer to this figure later, in connection with the Roumanian requisitions in Hungary.

Territorially, the Allies agreed to give Roumania too much, in the Banat at least, at the expense of the Serbs. They do not seem to have felt much indebted to the Serbs in 1915-16. Naturally, they guaranteed to preserve the existing Roumanian frontiers, in all respects. The claim that this 1916 treaty was abrogated by Roumania in signing the peace of Bucarest in 1918 is very foolish. The peace treaty was signed under absolute necessity, due to the Russian withdrawal from the war. Roumania herself tore it up the 9th of November, 1918, and proceeded to drive out the occupation troops. The Allies later formally declared it null and void in the armistice of November 11. Then it is officially done for, as far as either party to the present controversy is concerned, is it not?

It is comprehensible, even to intelligent Roumanians, how the Banat question might be re-opened by later events, such as the formation of the Jugo-Slav state. But they cannot understand how there can be any discussion of the integrity of their frontiers as they existed before the war and were expressly guaranteed by the Allies in 1916. South Dobroudja is here referred to. It is not disputed, as far as I know, that there are many times more Bulgarians than Roumanians in this territory; but it also seems evident to me that the question was one of negotiation, since Roumania had a legitimate title to the ground, ante-dating the war. The 1918 peace treaty of Bucarest is certainly dead, formally abrogated by *all* parties, though a few diplomats do seem to linger most unaccountably about the grave, considering their attitude toward the document during its lifetime. For the Allies to set up a military occupation of the South Dobroudja under Italian troops, or do anything else which might seem to question that Roumania was one of themselves, was an egregious diplomatic blunder. It looked from Roumania in 1919 as though the Allies had already broken most of the terms of their covenant, and were busily engaged at Paris in breaking the remainder.

In the summer of this year, a thrill of national indignation at this Italian occupation swept through the country, due

to the execution of a Roumanian soldier for visiting his home in the territory—within the frontiers before 1914. The Italian nation was presumably not to blame—it is to be supposed that the troops took their orders from the Paris Conference. But this episode bore no small part in the irritation which manifested itself immediately when Roumanian troops entered Hungary in August and the Peace Conference tried to deal with them through Italian officers. I was with this army myself in Hungary, and heard the incident mentioned innumerable times as evidence of Allied imperialism and of Italian hostility and treachery.

Soviet Hungary, to return to her case, was in difficulties. She was an isolated small country, reduced from her habitual boundaries, with imports and exports paralyzed. This in itself tended to embarrass the exchange of products within the frontiers—Hungary within its new boundaries is not completely self-supporting. The currency system was unstable, since the arbiters of the world had not recognized the government—although there were other reasons, of course. The government tried to get on a solid financial basis by gradually withdrawing the old Austro-Hungarian currency and replacing it with the so-called “white money” of Budapest; but this did not get into general circulation, thanks to the strangulation which began at the frontiers and pressed inward, and the uneasiness of people about the stability of the unrecognized government. The conservative country population a few miles out of the capital looked on the new money with cold suspicion, and preferred the old. The story of M. Sauerwein of *le Matin* that the peasants would not sell to Budapest merchants because they disliked the government shows a distinct lack of appreciation of the economic forces at work. Neither did the merchants generally like the government. People do not boycott each other in business because they mutually dislike a third party. The fact is, it gradually came to pass that Budapest had a currency which would not buy food; the country, a money much of which was not good, or would cease to be good within a few days in the capital, within



reach of the government's arm. Coal became scarce, manufacturing dwindled and the grip of hunger slowly but surely tightened on the city.

The only possible solution the foundering Hungarian government could see was to strike out boldly with its military arm. It might have attacked the Jugo-Slavs. How thoroughly such an attack would have fitted into Italian plans has been brought to light by recent events. Whether this trap was actually laid or not has been a subject of much discussion in the Near East. At any rate, the Hungarians thought it wiser to attack Roumania. Their force which deluged the Roumanian outposts east of Szolnock with artillery fire and crossed the Theiss in numbers in July was lavishly supplied with Italian as well as German materials. My Italian friends insist that these grenades, etc., were all captured at Caporetto. On the other hand, Roumanian staff officers produced strong arguments that some of the material was of more recent manufacture. I have the word of an officer who was present at the Italian-Roumanian interview just before the occupation of Budapest that the presence of some of these things was apologized for on the ground that they were intended for use against the Serbs.

One fairy tale which seems to have been joyfully accepted in the Occident is that the Hungarian soviet troops were of poor quality and did not fight well. On the contrary, they were well-trained, well-armed, skilfully led on the whole, and quite as brave as other soldiers. They made the most of the element of surprise in their favor (which they owed to Paris), and in the beginning had a great numerical superiority over the Roumanian forces immediately opposed to them. Their chance of success lay in the hope of piercing and disorganizing the Roumanian front before reinforcements could be brought up. They underestimated the dogged resistance of the Roumanian peasant soldier and the skill of his officers. The front bent deeply, about thirty miles in one place, but did not break. How bitter the fighting was along this restricted front may be imagined from the fact that the Roumanians suffered nearly five

thousand casualties during the first two days—the Hungarians presumably about an equal number. After all, the military qualities are about the commonest in the world, and are pretty evenly distributed over the human race. Instead of reinforcing the elements actually engaged, the Roumanian staff brought up shock troops on the flank of the Hungarian army, already far from its base and in provisioning difficulties, cut the line of communications and was able to disarm almost the entire force. Though little quarter had been shown in the fighting, most of the Hungarians were immediately set at liberty and told to go home. Those who were kept for work had at least as good quarters and food as their captors; and it was really an amazing sight to one coming from the French front, to see nearly all the hardest, dirtiest work done by the Roumanian soldiers themselves.

Crossing the Theiss, the Roumanians marched on Budapest, in spite of the protests of an Italian officer, who claimed to have consulted with an English general and to speak with the authority of Paris. From the Roumanian point of view, Hungary had herself created a purely military situation by an unprovoked attack. The Peace Conference had done nothing to prevent it, and there was no apparent reason why that body should now step in before a final decision had been reached. The Allies had kept secret the fact of Bela Kun's resignation the first of August; so that all they really had to say to the invading army was to request it to confide in the Paris Conference and to stay out of Budapest. But Roumania had tried confiding in the Allies in 1916, to her sorrow. The Allies were still breaking the promises made at that time—witness especially the occupation of South Dobroudja. The time was peculiarly inappropriate for Paris to speak to Bucarest through an Italian representative, not only because of the execution episode, but because more recently Italian liaison officers and military supplies had been found with the Hungarians. Then, of course, if they wished to be really critical of Allied assurances, there was also the case of Serbia, next door. She had accepted the statement in 1915 that if she would

not mobilize against Bulgaria everything would be all right. The skepticism had to do with Allied trustworthiness in the one instance and intelligence in the other.

One would have to live in Southwest Europe to have any conception of the irritation at the Peace Conference which grew up during this past summer. Besides the broken or unfulfilled promises, Roumania had before her the English fiasco on the Danube, and the French fiasco at Odessa, convincing proof that Paris was both a moral and a military liability as far as the Near East was concerned. The big powers were dictating to the little ones in Paris. The "rights" of smaller nationalities seemed to consist in subscribing to accomplished facts, or taking the consequences. Said people in the Balkans: "Why should these people dictate to us? Their soldiers will no longer fight, as we see. They are only irritating Russia, and as to Hungary, they do nothing but bluff, and when their bluff is called it is we who have to fight. We can understand dictatorship, but it must have force behind it."—Budapest was occupied the 4th of August.

When the Hungarian forces had been disarmed by Roumania, a number of Allied officers came to Budapest, without any soldiers worth mentioning at their backs. They increased the difficulties of the occupying army and created a good deal of irritation, but that was about all. It would be hard to find a more illuminating example of the futility of unarmed people interfering in a military situation. Commands and proscriptions were given, only to be blandly ignored. Threats were occasionally resorted to, producing some reaction at first; but a threat is ultimately founded on force, and if it is overworked the nervousness it causes wears away. Whether the Peace Conference ever contemplated the adoption of strong, efficacious methods is problematical even with some of us Occidentals. The Near East has been skeptical for a long time, and is apparently more so now that the Dalmatian affair has come to a head.

As to the "looting" in Budapest under Roumanian occupation, it was mostly an hallucination of the newspaper correspondents, in the first weeks at least. I saw none

and heard no complaints of it, though free to go about at will in my own motor car, and was interviewed at all sorts of hours and places by Hungarians. Very likely there were isolated cases—we have not entirely eliminated the burglar and highwayman from civilian life. The correspondents spoiled such stories as may have been really true by circulating wild rumors about armies of refugees floating about in some region vaguely indicated as eastward of the capital, where those of us who had been over the country in detail knew they could not possibly be. Coming into a city where life was terribly hard—people living largely on gourds at eight kronen per kilo—they charged the shortage of food and fuel which had existed for weeks to an army which had been there only a few days.

Stories of wild disorder in Budapest during the occupation are to be suspected. The fact that they were circulated during the early days when I know them to be untrue leads me to disbelieve them now. Strict discipline was maintained. Multitudes of people thronged the streets by day—Budapest is a big city, like Philadelphia, only much finer and better built. At night nobody but officers and people with special military passes were allowed on the streets after nine o'clock—absolutely nobody but the guards after ten. These guards made their rounds in military formation, never less than a squad, fully equipped and officered.

Now as to requisitions: The Roumanians had collected several hundred railway cars at Szolnock when I passed through on my way to Bucarest. The bridge was being repaired so they could be taken into Roumania. Some of these cars were loaded with merchandise, some were empty. Requisitioning was going on at Budapest during my stay; but the country was not being gutted as Roumania had been under the Hungarian-German occupation. We may say this has no bearing on the situation, but it has for the Roumanians, and would have for us in their place. All the efforts of the Peace Conference and the Soviets have not yet ushered in the millennium of the brotherhood of man, so we had better think in terms of what happens in

the actual world. One of these sordid facts is that people do not immediately forget great, material wrongs done them. We would do well to remember, in connection with some hundreds of carloads of Roumanian requisitions in Hungary, that part of the mental background of the people who made them consists of the hopeless impossibility of ever getting back the 150,000 carloads or so on the other side of the balance, and that Bulgaria, Austria and Germany have apparently got off clean with the remaining two and a half millions of tons. To give merely illustrative items, a million head of cattle and over four million head of sheep were carried off from Roumania by the Central Powers. Roumania is getting comparatively few of these back. She may get a few thousand in Hungary, but the part she holds was worked over by the Bela Kun army before she arrived.

People should, it seems, show some sympathetic imagination concerning facts that are dramatic and convincing in themselves, whether or not they agree with the conclusions drawn from them. For example, the Allied people evinced great indignation one day because the Roumanians were taking hospital supplies in Budapest. The statement that a considerable proportion of these supplies were of Roumanian origin was investigated by me personally, and is true. In one large hospital storehouse in the southern part of the city, the shelves were lined with bottles and packages bearing the labels of the Roumanian Sanitary Service, Red Cross, and of private druggists from Bucarest to Braila and from Braila to Turnu Severin. In one room was a large number of big cases which still bore the routing marks to Jassy, Roumania, via Vladivostok—unopened.

If we would calmly and critically examine the Roumanian position, we should see no abnormal lack of frankness or clarity, compared with the actions of other nations. Roumania has said repeatedly that if the Peace Conference wishes to charge the materials taken out of Hungary against a future settlement, she is quite willing. Privately, Roumanians would tell you they think this is all they will ever get, and that if they had not acted as they did they would have got nothing at all. The Peace Conference has not

inspired much confidence in southeastern Europe. These people criticize its interpretation of "open covenants, openly arrived at" as illustrated by its own procedure, not to mention the freedom of the seas, alliances, the rights of small nationalities, economic discrimination and others of the fourteen shimmering promises upon which it began its career. Captain Sapelli remarks (in the November "Current History") that the English-Persian treaty is an abortion of the League of Nations, and goes so far as to suggest that neither France nor England has renounced "advantageous private engagements." If we lived in Roumania, this skepticism might call to mind the French shipments of perfumes, silk stockings and other luxury goods to that country last spring in order to pocket fabulous profits off the rich at a time when every pound of carrying capacity was needed to take food to the actually starving. Now we see D'Annunzio in Fiume, with his eye on the whole Dalmatian coast, and nobody daring to apply the force it would take to stop him.

With all these things before us, we still seem to regard Roumania as a detached case of moral obliquity; we lack the perspective to see her in her appropriate setting—how nicely she blends into the general background of European diplomacy. We hug the delusion that an international group can make its decisions respected without force; and some there seem still to be who have learned nothing from one refusal after another of Western European troops this year to serve effectively as international policemen. If anyone believes that our feet are at last planted on the higher ground of international disinterestedness, let him imagine a few sparks dropped into the Banat and Dalmatian situations today. Roumania wants the Banat; Italy wants Dalmatia; Jugo-Slavia, which holds both, is momentarily in a very disadvantageous position, without any outlets of her own to the sea. There is no fundamental reason why the Italians and Roumanians should disagree—the languages are astonishingly similar, and there is nothing in their recent misunderstanding which cannot be explained away by charging it to the Peace Conference. Remember—

ing that France, a sister Latin nation, is inclined to sympathize with both recalcitrants, imagine the Peace Conference or League of Nations attempting to get the Roumanians out of Hungary and the Italians out of Fiume, until they get ready to leave.